

## CHAPTER 9

## Pitfalls/Discipline

**Status Quo:**

**"So — the famous  
Justice League of  
Washington! Even  
your amazing  
coordinated re-  
sources are no  
match for me! As  
you can see, not  
only have I captured  
the hearts and  
minds of the welfare  
workers, I already  
have the three  
Goddesses of Justice  
in my power!  
Thanks to this  
simple device (holds  
up a remote control)  
that controls the  
amazing Helmets of  
Indifference, they  
are unable to  
perceive inequities  
in the system you set  
up and perpetuate.  
Hahahaha!"**

**From "The Justice League  
of Washington"**

# HELMET OF INDIFFERENCE



## STAYING ON THE ROAD... THE CARE AND FEEDING OF YOUR EQUAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

**STATUS QUO'S SONG**

*(to the tune of "Sympathy for the Devil")*

Please allow me to introduce myself, I'm the  
man who stops all change  
I've been around a long long time, and though  
you may think it's strange  
I am here to make Washington lose the urge to  
rearrange  
You can find me everywhere, well, except the  
stock exchange

Pleased to meet you, hope you know your place  
I can keep you from ever getting to first base

Let's have everyone stay inside a lot  
And never look around  
You know me, just call me Status Quo  
I'll keep you underground

So when you meet me, show some courtesy  
We don't need no class-action case  
Forget your brave new policies  
I can lay them all to waste

Pleased to meet you, don't forget my name  
It's Latin for — staying just the same!

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**From "The State's Greatest Superheroes: The Justice League of Washington vs.  
Supervillain Status Quo — "When Indifference Strikes,"  
written and produced for *WORKING TOGETHER TO CHAMPION JUSTICE*,  
Washington State's Fifth Annual Access to Justice Conference, September 2000**

In the skit referenced above, Supervillain Status Quo has six henchmen: Cynicism, Prejudice, Ignorance, Burnout, Suspicion and Bias, who run around putting the “Helmet of Indifference” on those trying to help orphans get legal assistance. Status Quo’s avowed goal is to plunge the entire state into partisan squabbling, turf wars and despair, so he can reign supreme.

The message contained in this none-too-subtle musical allegory is a very important one. Reverting to status quo is an easy and attractive option when you become mired in the everyday struggle to serve clients and to fight for adequate funding. Status quo seems even more alluring when, as part of a larger effort, you are called upon to educate those hostile to your community’s vision. Status quo arises again as the easy way out when you must think beyond your immediate needs to work strategically within the structure of the plans and initiatives that have been developed to build and strengthen your Equal Justice Community.

Breakdowns in communication and cooperation are all too common at this stage, where competing institutional needs seemingly can’t be resolved to anyone’s complete satisfaction, and where the competing pressures threaten to manifest themselves in the all-too-human reactions of turf protection, burn-out, cynicism, suspicion and misgivings.

The key to derailing this serious threat is, first of all, to understand that it is universal and inevitable. Then you must work very hard – and constantly – to stay true to the destination, principles and core values through care and feeding of the network, giving up institutional power, and role modeling the community’s values.

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## CARE AND FEEDING

A good way to understand what we are getting at here would be to look again at the first sample road map that depicted a number of possible roads for getting to your desired destination that you prepared as a part of the exercise suggested in Chapter 7. Now ask yourselves these questions: Are there any legs of my community’s journey on which I would not (or should not) be the driver, but where my direct assistance and support (i.e. servant-leadership/followership) could nevertheless be vital to the community’s safe and successful arrival? Shouldn’t I be willing to chip in for the gas? Are there some bridges that only my traveling companions need, but which could not be built without some of my labor and materials? Are there some detours and impasses that I could easily avert, but which my colleagues could not avoid without my help? (Think here about community efforts such as “barn-raising” and fire-fighting by “bucket brigade.”)

Like other Equal Justice Communities, yours is most likely to stay (or get back) on track if it recognizes from the outset that what may seem to be burdensome tasks unrelated to any important immediate goal can actually have great value. Such efforts are often impor-

tantly and vitally linked to the eventual success of the enterprise. Some examples:

- County funding will be slashed for several small programs that provide a narrow range of civil legal services in limited substantive areas. The overall impact will not be substantial from a statewide perspective. However, the community's capacity to provide full-range services will be lessened. The statewide Equal Justice Coalition undertakes a broad telephone, letter-writing and e-mailing campaign. The vice-chair of the statewide Access to Justice Board, together with the state's IOLTA program director and the director of one of the statewide legal services programs, attend county hearings, influential contacts are sought, all to get funding restored. These efforts succeed in averting only the immediate crisis, but they produce better communication, cooperation and camaraderie throughout the Equal Justice Community.
- A statewide legal services program, responsible under the state plan to establish and maintain the primary client intake and brief services system for the entire network, was convinced that client service would be substantially enhanced were the program to add extensive legal information and self-help materials to its website. The proposed addition would promote uniformity, improve quality control and accessibility, and save significant resources from a network-wide perspective. However, several network partners had been producing and disseminating brochures relating to many of the areas that would be covered. These organizations had pride in authorship and perceived this function as part of their institutional stature and their funding. All of the institutions involved had the *power* to not cooperate – and in so doing, to throw the long-range effort significantly off track. Instead, they refocused on the long-term vision, and the principles and core values to which they had all subscribed; and every organization involved found it possible to relinquish some of its power and control for a larger purpose and a greater benefit to clients.

***"To succeed, your  
Equal Justice  
Community's leaders  
must actively  
embody the core  
principles and  
values to which it  
subscribes."***

**Ada Shen-Jaffe, Director,  
Columbia Legal Services**

This pattern has been replicated in other contexts as well — for example in reassigning responsibility for training and state support, or when determinations have ultimately been made to forego competing for funding that could be more effectively employed by partners with superior expertise or who were hampered by fewer restrictions on their work.

There was one clear winner. Who? IT'S THE CLIENTS, STUPID.

### **ROLE-MODELING THE COMMUNITY'S VALUES**

To succeed, your Equal Justice Community's leaders must actively embody the core principles and values to which it subscribes. But – as helpful as they may be – repeating the "mantras," wearing the buttons, and even singing in the annual conference skit will not be nearly enough. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, one principled act is truly worth more than a zillion sermons when it comes to inculcating fundamental values. This

is particularly so when the principled act costs us something. In the last analysis, true leadership really does occur only – and always – through example.

Example: In several Washington State communities, individuals who formerly served as directors have willingly agreed to serve in completely different, though no less important, roles. It is difficult to conceive of a more dramatic illustration. Their behavior communicated an unmistakable message about the power and importance of a larger vision and strongly reinforced the willingness and ability of others to envision a true team effort in which all community members could lead at some times and follow at others.

Though less dramatic, the examples provided throughout this section all serve to illustrate the kind of role-modeling of values that will be required. Wherever successful Equal Justice Communities are emerging, you are certain to find leaders who are making it a habit to ask some hard questions of themselves and their partners: Who else ought to be included in our network? Would some or all of the authority that we are currently exercising be more effectively exercised by others? Are our actions and those of our organizations held adequately accountable to our clients and to all partners? Are the motivations for all of our decisions really client-centered?

By thus "walking its talk" your Equal Justice Community will avoid many mishaps and sidetracks entirely. And, though it undoubtedly will still have to confront and overcome some obstacles that simply cannot be avoided, it will find that it has developed the strength of character and purpose to enable it to do so.

### **THE REAL JUSTICE GUY:**

***"Wait! It's true that you are all fictional characters. But — at least for a few more months — I really am The Justiceguy! (Tears open shirt to reveal superhero logo.) We defeated Status Quo this time, but if we are to succeed in making our state truly the land of the free, we need the help of everyone here. You actually can go out and make the Justice League of Washington a reality. Join us! Become a Champion of Justice — and sing along!"***

**From "The Justice League of Washington"**



**EXERCISE**

Review the principles and core values that you came up with in Chapter 2. Pick one or two and imagine some specific actions you might take that would underscore their purpose and worth, while encouraging others to follow your example. How does your personal or organizational loss, if any, compare to the community's gain?

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***It is difficult to conceive of a more dramatic illustration...about the power and importance of a larger vision.***